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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Special Olympics and Down syndrome: The investigate of Self-efficacy and interpersonal dependency

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of Special Olympics (SO) programs on self- efficacy and interpersonal dependency among Iran Special Olympians with Down Syndrome (DS). Forty DS members of Iran's national team were selected as SO athletes and 36 DS athletes were selected as control group. The SO group participated in 9 months SO sport specific program whereas athletes were involved in common physical exercise. Wheeler and Ladd's Children's self-efficacy for Peer Interactions Scale and Interpersonal Dependency Inventory (IDI) were used to collect data from the two groups before and after 9 month long athletic programs. The results showed that both programs have significant effects on the Self- efficacy and interpersonal dependency of the two groups, but after 9 months, the SO athletes were significantly ($p \leq 0.01$) better than the non-SO athletes in all sub-scales of self-efficacy and interpersonal dependency. It seems that participation in social-sport aspects of Special Olympics programs can promote the self-efficacy and interpersonal dependency among this population beyond the ordinary sport programs, especially for DS people. Generalizing these programs for this people can help them to show their abilities and give them self-efficacy to live without dependency to others.

Key words: Special Olympics (SO), Down Syndrome (DS), Self-efficacy, Interpersonal Dependency.

Introduction

One of the major mental disorders among intellectually disable individuals is lack of social skills caused by their physical disabilities [1]. They also have other disorders including the inability in building up peer relationships, low self-confidence and mental disorders caused by the lack of physical fitness and adiposity [2 and 3]. When people have high self-efficacy and little dependence on others, they feel minimal levels of social anxiety and thus do not experience the subsequent problems [4]. On the other hand, individuals with high self-efficacy bear the lowest degrees of mental pressures in dealing with the social world [5].

Inadequate social skills may also be one of the sources of children's social anxiety, which may result in their lack of self-efficacy and dependency [6]. According to the self-efficacy theory, when individuals notice a social disorder in themselves, they doubt their capabilities and, consequently, lose their self-efficacy [7].

A variety of factors including exposure to novel and unknown situations unfavorable social

experiences [8] and mental and physical defects [9] may reduce self-efficacy and dependency [6] in intellectual disability individuals. Since there is a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and dependence on others [10 and 11] it seems that the lower is one's self-efficacy, the more he/she loses his/her abilities in expressing excitement and, consequently, he/she grows more dependent on others. Over time, this cycle will result in the individual's confusion and loss of self-confidence [12].

Interpersonal dependency has been found to act as a diathesis through which high levels of interpersonal stress lead to increased symptoms of depression and illness [13].

One of the most common genetic disorders among the intellectually disable individuals is DS. One out of every 700 to 1000 infants is afflicted by DS [14]. It has been estimated that individuals with DS 5 times as much mental disorders as healthy people [15].

It seems that individuals with DS have higher levels of mental and behavioral disorders comparing with the other mentally retarded individuals [16]. Bhattacharyya, Sanyal, Roy & Saha (2009) reported

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